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Remarks of D. F. Houston, Secretary of Agriculture,
before the National Association of Commissioners of
Agriculture, at Baltimore, Md., January 7, 1919



WASHINGTON, D. C., JANUARY 10, 1919

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THIS is a novel and to me an interesting experience. The most novel thing about it is that it is novel. This is the first time that the Secretary of Agriculture of the United States has had the privilege of meeting the representatives of the State Departments of Agriculture collectively or as a body. It is a late beginning. I trust that it will not be a bad beginning and that it will become at least an annual custom. It is certainly highly proper that the administrative officer representing the Nation in respect to agriculture should, from time to time, meet and confer with the State agricultural administrative officials, for they have many difficult and important problems of common concern to deal with and should be able to be mutually helpful.

I am not able to explain why your Association was not formed before it was; why it should not have been functioning effectively long before this; and why I have not heretofore had the satisfaction of taking part in its proceedings. I can only say that I wish it had been possible to have such meetings as this at least each of the last six years. I am always glad to meet responsible people seriously interested in matters with which I have to deal and to counsel with them. I enjoy cooperating with people. I would rather work with people than to work separately. I would much rather work with people than to work against them; and it is true, is it not, that when people do not get together and counsel with one another they very frequently work in opposition, or, at least, at cross purposes?

COOPERATION THE ESSENCE OF SOCIETY.

Cooperation, it would seem to me, is the easiest and simplest thing in the world. It is the essence of society. Modern democratic government is cooperation; but, unfortunately, the spirit of cooperation is imperfect everywhere, even among those who, by reason of their training and intelligence, ought completely to reveal it. Cooperation is not by any means perfect between State and Federal

officers, or between officers of one State or Federal department and those of another, or even between officers in the same department. There are many causes for this. Some are real; others are imaginary. Most men who are worth while become very much interested in their task. They are inclined to magnify it, to expand it, thinking that by so doing they will serve the public. Not infrequently they soon find themselves charged with invading the province of another enthusiast, and friction is set up. Others are selfish. There is unquestionably a great deal of institutional selfishness abroad, and I have felt at times that some institutions were thinking so much about themselves that they were in danger of forgetting the public they were created to serve. Still other individuals in charge of activities are suspicious and waste much of their own time and that of others trying to head off trespass or invasion which was never contemplated.

Cooperation is not easy with men who have much energy but no sense of direction, no honesty of purpose, and no spirit of public service. It is peculiarly difficult with the men who have much energy but no sense of direction. They are like the beetle. They mistake energy for efficiency. Doubtless each of you knows such men. I do. I know a few more or less conspicuous individuals answering to this description who have been pestering the Nation for some years.

It is all a matter of intelligence, of right attitude, and of that understanding which comes from contact and conference. I hope it will prevail more and more perfectly between your Association and its members and the Department of Agriculture; prevail more and more throughout the Union; and even among the peoples of the whole world.

It has become a habit to me to cooperate with State officers. Both formally, under terms of law, and informally the Department cooperates with a number of State agencies. Under the Smith-Lever law, it cooperates with the agricultural college in each State in the Union, and under the Federal Aid Road Act, with each State highway commission. The principle established by these laws is very beneficent and suggestive. It results in placing the officers of the two agencies serving the people in close and effective contact, securing unity of plan and action. It results in the elimination of waste and duplication of effort and provides suggestively for a way out of the difficulties of double jurisdiction.

But in many other matters difficulties in the way of cooperation arise, especially because of the dispersion of powers affecting agriculture in many of the States, because in some of them the line of demarcation between the powers of State agencies has not been

drawn, and because even in some States where there are State commissioners or boards of agriculture they possess inadequate powers or funds. I recall very vividly the difficulties we had at the outset in combating the gravest animal disease that has appeared in this country, namely, the foot-and-mouth disease. It was necessary that action should be prompt and effective, and yet in some of the States it was difficult to discover the authority possessing either funds or adequate power to make cooperation prompt and effective.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATES WITH NUMEROUS STATE AGENCIES.

I have recently reviewed the cooperative relations of the Department of Agriculture with State agencies. The results reveal no little chaos and lack of organization. Through the Federal Horticultural Board the Department cooperates with the plant inspection service in nearly every State of the Union and with boards of agriculture in five States in the control of the gipsy and brown tail moth; through the Biological Survey, with 41 States, either through fish and game commissions or game wardens, State sanitary boards, conservation commissions, or special societies, in the enforcement of the migratory bird law, the Lacey Act, and the destruction of predatory animals; through Farm Management, in 11 States with the departments of agriculture, and in nearly all the States with councils of national defense in the mobilization of labor; through Soils, in 11 States with State geological bureaus, and in 4 with State colleges or universities in soil survey work; through Chemistry, with all the States in the enforcement of the Food and Drugs Act, in some of them dealing with five or six agencies, as in Kansas, for instance, with the State board of health, the chief of the food and drug division, the University of Kansas, the State dairy commission, the director of experiment stations, and the State chemist; through Animal Industry, in a third of the States with State boards of agriculture, and in many more with State sanitary agencies of one sort or another in the control or eradication of the cattle tick, hog cholera, tuberculosis, and other animal diseases; through the Bureau of Markets, with market agencies in a number of States; through the Bureau of Entomology, with State entomologists; and through Plant Industry, in 11 States with boards of agriculture in the control of such plant diseases as the citrus canker, white pine blister rust, and in the eradication of the barberry plant, and in many more States with special agencies, such as plant boards, land agents, conservation commissions, forestry commissions, and State entomologists, State economic zoologists, and State inspectors of nurseries.

NEED OF A STRONG DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN EACH STATE.

The matter of securing a great effective department of agriculture in each State of the Union, of giving it adequate power over appropriate matters, and of drawing a reasonable line of demarcation between its powers and those of any other State establishment, has been forced before my mind by the difficulties I have encountered in administering the Federal Department and has been in the forefront of my thinking since I have been in Washington. It is singular, when we come to think of it, that some States in existence for many years have proceeded without strong State administrative bodies dealing with agriculture having the requisite powers and sufficient funds.

Certainly agriculture is one of the things which the States of the Union can afford with the greatest propriety to foster and to develop through the best possible organization. It would appear from the records in the early days of the Union that even such men as Hamilton considered agriculture as the field for the exclusive attention of State governments. In one of the papers in the *Federalist*, in advocating the adoption of the Constitution and in attempting to allay the fear of those who thought the instrument provided for an unduly centralized government, he asserted that there was no justification for apprehension, since it created a government which would deal mainly with foreign affairs, finance, justice, and national military matters. As to the great field of domestic interest, such as agriculture, he asserted no one would entertain the thought that the Federal Government would occupy it. It would be a field for occupation rather by the State governments.

No one would question today the desirability of a great Federal agency to deal with appropriate agricultural and related matters, but equally no one should question the high desirability of the most effective possible State department to supervise and foster agriculture. Although I have had this matter in mind for some time, naturally since necessary adjustment involves State action, I have had a delicacy and hesitancy in dealing with it.

INTRUST DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE WITH REGULATION, COLLEGES WITH EDUCATION.

Now the matter stands in a different situation. Two great State organizations, your own and the Association of Land-Grant Colleges, have had the matter under advisement and have arrived essentially at a common mind. I am informed that the thought of the two bodies is that a great gain would result if the States adopted the policy, in general, of confining the agricultural colleges to investiga-

tional and educational work, both in the colleges and in the field, and the commissioners or boards of agriculture to administrative and regulatory matters, heading up under such commissioners or boards all the appropriate administrative and regulatory activities affecting agriculture, thus providing in each State two great, strong, central agencies for the betterment of agriculture and rural life.

This course, it seems to me, would be eminently wise. It would remove possibilities of duplication of work, of wasted energies, of jealousy and friction, and make it possible for the two great State establishments to work with a common purpose and with united forces. It would also very greatly facilitate the work of the Department of Agriculture, much of which must be carried on of necessity in cooperation with State officers. The Department would then be in a position to cooperate untrammelled with the colleges of agriculture in investigational and educational work and with the State departments of agriculture in all matters involving regulation, such as quarantines, the control of animal disease, orchard and nursery inspection, seed inspection, feed and fertilizer control, statistical inquiries, and the highly important tasks of aiding the farmer in the promotion of better rural finance and in the regulatory phases of the distribution and marketing of his products. If this is the plan of the two bodies, I shall be very glad in all appropriate ways to give it such support as I can and to aid in securing its acceptance in any State where action may be needed. I know that there will be difficulties and that the problem will have to be dealt with in each State in the light of local conditions. It may be that no given plan would be feasible for every State; but I take the liberty of suggesting, for your consideration, the desirability of developing and presenting a tentative model law.

FINANCIAL COOPERATION.

In respect to financial cooperation with State departments, I am not at present aware that there is likely to be any departure in principle from that which already obtains. I suspect that the Congress will continue to make available appropriations to the Department of Agriculture for the necessary work in reference to all regulatory activities, and that it would be neither appropriate nor desirable for the Federal Government to make available to the States directly any funds for the support of their regulatory and administrative agencies. It may be that provision may be made on principles similar to those in the Federal Aid Road Act for other worthy enterprises; but, if this precedent is followed, appropriations will be made to the Federal Department to be used in cooperation with State agencies and State funds for appropriate purposes.

It is interesting to note that only recently a bill has been introduced providing for cooperative action on the part of the Federal and State governments in the matter of rural health. I know of no more urgent need than that which would be met by this bill, and I urgently hope that it will receive prompt and favorable consideration.

BETTER COORDINATION OF STATE AGENCIES.

It would be rash to say that there may not be similar undertakings in other fields; and it is clear that a better coordination of the agencies of the several States would facilitate such action and render the prospect of satisfactory results more certain. This is the last great step that needs to be taken to complete the organization of the governmental agencies, State and Federal, dealing with agriculture. I regard it as of the utmost importance that it be taken as quickly and as fully as possible, and I wish you speedy success in your efforts and in all your well-considered worthy plans and purposes.

VICTORIES OF PEACE TO BE WON BY EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION.

We have just passed through a great crisis, in which once more the Nation has been made aware of its own power, of the fruits of effective organization, and of its power under patriotic impulse and unity of mind and purpose. To win the right to be free from the dictation of an arrogant power was worth all the sacrifices that the free nations of the earth have made and all the pains we have experienced in securing harmonious and united action. We shall be unworthy of this freedom if we do not realize that it simply extends our opportunity to do the things that make life worth while. There are victories of peace to be won no less important than those of war, and it is now incumbent on us to reveal the same spirit of patriotism and unity in winning daily the victories of peace and in securing to every individual, whether in the city or in the country, the fullest opportunity for his self-development and for the expansion of his capacities in the highest degree, without which equality of opportunity is, in a measure, a meaningless phrase.

On behalf of the Federal Government, I desire to thank you for the firm support you gave to all its purposes and to its plans for winning the war. I am deeply grateful to you especially for the assistance you gave to the Department of Agriculture. In every direction at all times you cooperated with it in its efforts to secure an increased production and a fuller conservation and better distribution of food. I am aware also that in every possible way on your own initiative you omitted nothing which would strengthen the Nation and aid it in its grim task. I shall look forward confidently with great pleasure to a fuller and more effective combination of effort from this time forward.